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ABSTRACT

A report based on information gathered by interviewing ten family day care mothers is presented. The following categories represent the problem and need areas discussed by the day care mothers who were interviewed: Activities, Problems with Natural Parents, Relating to the Children, and Financial Problems. The mothers were asked to discuss any problems they have encountered connected with their caretaker functions; remedies, if any, to these problems; and suggestions of topics that should be included in a training program for family day care mothers. Six of the ten day care mothers felt that the most important topic to be covered in a training program would be appropriate activities for various aged children. Also, most felt that it would be important to include in a training program ways of relating with the natural parents. Most felt that it would be extremely useful for child development professionals to discuss child-related topics in a training program. Finally, most of the mothers felt the need for information on filling out income tax forms. It is pointed out that family day care mothers can and should serve as integral parts in the planning and execution of training programs. (CK)

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FAMILY DAY CARE

FAMILY DAY CARE MOTHERS: WHAT THEY WANT IN TRAINING PROGRAMS

FAMILY DAY CARE MOTHERS: WHAT THEY WANT IN TRAINING PROGRAMS

by

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Credit and thanks are due to ten family day care mothers in Tompkins County who shared with Alice Trisdorfer their concerns, their satisfactions and their needs as they perceive them.

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Family day care provides a unique type of caretaker situation where young children can spend their daytime and sometimes evening hours in surroundings that combine a nursery-school-like environment (including toys, games and art materials for enjoyment and educational purposes) with the comfort and security of a family atmosphere. In addition, family day care is a necessary resource in the community since there are not sufficient numbers of all-day nursery schools or group day care centers to accommodate the children of working parents.

The present report is based on information gathered by interviewing ten family day care mothers, both licensed and unlicensed, in Tompkins County, N.Y.

The day care mothers were asked to discuss any problems they have encountered connected with their caretaker functions; remedies, if any, to these problems; and suggestions of topics that should be included in a training program for family day care mothers. Hopefully a training program for day care mothers would take into consideration the needs and wants expressed by the women themselves and not merely what child development specialists think they require.

We do not wish to imply that one can generalize the expressed needs and problems of the ten women interviewed to other day care mothers in different communities. It should be noted, however, that other studies and research projects have revealed similar findings. The following categories represent the problem and need areas discussed by the day care mothers who were interviewed.

I. Activities

Six of the ten day care mothers felt that the most important topic to be covered in a training program would be appropriate activities for various aged children. Often a day care mother must care for children of different ages, thus making one activity for all of the children impossible. The women were eager to learn which activities are enjoyable and educational for children of particular ages. Since there is not a large profit gained from being a day care mother, they requested information concerning inexpensive materials that would be both entertaining and beneficial. The important point raised by the day care mothers expressed the desire for a training program that would be action-oriented rather than geared to lectures and discussions. The women stressed the necessity of participating in the arts and crafts activities presented in a training program.

The day care mothers who were interviewed expressed a positive attitude toward the Gathering Place, a support service in Ithaca, N.Y., designed to bring together members of the community, caretakers and professionals concerned with child care. This agency provides a relaxed atmosphere in which individuals, including day care mothers, can share ideas and problems with others in an attempt to expand and improve day care facilities. The Gathering Place sponsors workshops and demonstrations on topics such as play activities, snack food ideas and lectures on areas of concern including first aid. Several of the women interviewed suggested that every community should have a supporting service such as the Gathering Place where day care mothers, nursery school staff, interested citizens, natural parents, etc., can meet and learn about enjoyable and beneficial activities for children, nutrition, health and other areas of concern.

Several of the day care mothers also suggested a cooperative store where caretakers could either borrow (via a library-type system) or purchase at low cost the necessary equipment such as toys, cribs, blankets, play pens, etc.[1] This co-op could sponsor community drives in order to obtain donations of the needed equipment. It is an expensive undertaking for family day care mothers to purchase the equipment needed for the caring of young children and babies at local stores.

Several of the day care mothers mentioned that the children they cared for appreciated storybooks. However, these women did not have enough time in their busy schedules to go to the public library. They suggested that perhaps a certain number of books could be brought to them each month.[2] The day care mothers realized that reading was an enjoyable and important educational activity for children.

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[1] The Montessori Nursery School provides a "community cupboard" from which parents and other caretakers can borrow toys and games included in the Montessori program. However, there is only limited equipment available.

[2] An experimental program was organized in Tompkins County in which a social worker from the Department of Social Services brought a packet of books to a few family day care homes. This project was a huge success; unfortunately, the Department did not feel that it had the time to continue this service. Presently, the Friends of the Library (an organization dedicated to fund raising for the Tompkins County Library) is trying to recruit volunteers to reinstate this valuable program.

II. Problems with Natural Parents

Another area that the day care mothers felt would be important to include in a training program has to do with relating to the natural parents. Obviously it is essential for the welfare of the children and day care mother that rapport be established with the working parents. Friction in this relationship may negatively affect the child in either the day care home or in his own home. Many of the women mentioned the following problems in dealing with natural parents: delay in payment, delay in picking up the child (not notifying the day care mother of an expected detainment), not supplying the child with the necessary equipment (such as a change of clothing) and requests to do unreasonable chores (for example, ironing).

The caretakers suggested several ways to alleviate these problems. First, they felt that the natural parents should (perhaps must) attend several meetings where they can be informed about equipment they need to supply for their child in the day care home and certain courtesies (such as notifying the day care mother of delay in picking up child) that will improve their relationship with the day care mother. Second, during the training program certain guidelines for fee collection and for duties of a day care mother should be discussed. One day care mother suggested keeping an extra supply of diapers and clothing on hand in case the natural parents neglect doing this.

All the day care mothers interviewed said that meeting the natural parents and child either in the day care home or in the child's home is necessary prior to the day care mother's acceptance of the child. During this encounter, the day care mother should attempt to ascertain whether her schedule and views of discipline, toilet training, feeding, etc., are compatible with those of the parents. A conflict at this early stage probably indicates further problems. The day care mother also should observe the behavior of the child to determine whether he is likely to adapt to the day care home and the other children within it.

III. Relating to the Children

Most of the day care mothers felt that it would be extremely useful for child development professionals such as early childhood education specialists and child psychologists to discuss the following material in a training program: effective means of discipline (physical versus psychological punishment), toilet training, feeding and behavioral and ability norms. In addition, the women expressed a need for the day care mothers and a child psychologist to meet together during a training program to discuss certain behavior problems often found in young children such as shyness, aggressiveness and hyperactivity. The psychologist could answer questions about specific problems and also address himself to suggestions concerning coping with these behavioral situations. Furthermore, the day care mothers suggested having a psychologist serve as a consultant who could respond to questions via telephone conversations with day care mothers.

During her interview, one day care mother stressed the importance of establishing a good relationship with the children. She felt that a workable relationship could be reached only if the child were in the day care home a minimum of three hours a day and three days a week. Otherwise the child would not have sufficient time in which to acquaint himself with the new surroundings, the day care mother and the other children. In addition, this day care mother believed that teenagers from the 4-H Club and Girl Scouts, on a part-time basis, could aid the caretaker and also offer the child more varied experiences.

The day care mothers also were concerned with the topic of nutrition. Since licensed day care mothers are expected to provide a hot lunch for the children, they were interested in learning about recipes that were economical, easy to prepare, nutritious and liked by the children. Several women mentioned that they found the newsletter prepared for food stamp recipients, which contains economical recipes and foods on sale during the month, to be very helpful.

First aid was another topic the day care mothers felt was important to include in a training program. Specifically, they expressed interest in current practices for treatment of fractures, burns, convulsions and other emergencies. Also, the women wanted to learn the symptoms of common childhood diseases and their treatment, if any. One caretaker suggested distribution of poison-control fact sheets to day care mothers during the training program.

IV. Financial Problems

Most of the day care mothers seemed uninformed about completing income tax forms and the possible deductions available to family day care mothers. This information would be valuable to include in a training program.

Several women discussed the financial hazards of a day care mother. Their income is highly changeable and can vary greatly from week to week, depending on the number of children. Cancellations often occur without prior notice, and at times, the children must stay home because of illness. Therefore, it is quite important for day care mothers to be paid for holidays and occasional sick days. One day care mother suggested that the Department of Social Services might provide a minimum guaranteed income for family day care mothers.

V. Conclusions

As mentioned previously, the specific problems of family day care mothers might vary (although not significantly) from individual to individual and from community to community. However, certain goals of a training program for day care mothers should be consistent. It is essential that day care mothers be informed of the child care resources available in the community.

This report serves as an example that day care mothers do have valuable suggestions and can express needs and wants with respect to a training program. It seems ridiculous and artificial to prepare a training program for day care mothers based solely on the recommendations of child development specialists. Family day care mothers can and should serve as integral parts in the planning and execution of training programs.

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